

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Town Board of the Town of Durham held February 13, 2020 at the Town Hall commencing at 6:30 p.m.

Present: Joan Breslin, Deputy Supervisor
Linda Sutton, Council Member
George Deckers, Council Member
Scott Hulbert, Council Member

Absent: Shawn Marriott, Supervisor

Recording Secretary: Janet Partridge, Town Clerk

Others Present: Chrissy Kohrs, Court Clerk
David Cunningham, Building Inspector
Karen Tirpak, Bookkeeper/Judge
Patti Fetty, Deputy Clerk
Tom Sutton, Police
Joe van Holsteyn, Highway Superintendent
Paul Capulli, Deputy Highway Superintendent
Ray Armstrong, Highway
Justin Lounsbury, Highway
Matt Mattice, Highway
2 community members – Matt Hausmann and Steve Tirpak

Deputy supervisor Breslin called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. with the Pledge to the Flag.

The board reviewed an email from Council Member Hulbert that he wrote as a template for the board to use going forward as they review offering health insurance coverage for part-time employees when they retire:

He suggested being eligible for coverage the retiree must be 55 or older, have 20 continuous calendar years of service and have minimum of 4,680 hours for the 3 years prior to retirement. The town would cover 75% of a single plan, not the family. The option to enroll in family plan would be available but the difference would be paid by the retiree. The reason he put 75% was to keep it fair to full time employees. Full time employees are working 40+ hrs per week and these employees would be working 30+ hrs per week. Of course we would need to run the numbers once we decide on a plan to see if it is fiscally feasible. It can be changed, but it is a good place to start.

The board discussed full-time and part-time designations they will put in the revised handbook. Town Clerk Partridge shared that the IRS website and the NYSRS website state full-time as anywhere from 32hrs/week or more. Breslin recapped they had discussed 40+hrs/week was full-time and then there was a split between 20hrs/week and a couple who work 30hrs per week for part-time. Hulbert expressed his feelings that full-time are 40hrs/week or more and less should all be part-time. He feels they need to be fair to those working 40+hrs/week since it wouldn't be fair to give the same benefits to someone working 30hrs/week as someone who is 40+hrs/week. Breslin agreed. Hulbert asked Highway Superintendent van Holsteyn his

thoughts. He agreed that categorizing the highway guys who are 40+hrs/week the same as someone working 30hrs/week who could some weeks work only 26 hours isn't right.

Court Clerk Kohrs questioned the bona-fide retirement benefit requirement. Breslin was also surprised it stated that and explained that is one of the reasons the current board is reviewing the handbook and updating it. She stated she was not on the board when the handbook was written and approved; the handbook was approved by 5 other board members and a town attorney and all our employees signed they agreed with the following the handbook. Kohrs informed her when she signed the agreement she also wrote she did not agree with some of the polices within the book. Many employees in the room said then had to sign the handbook agreement paper or they wouldn't be employed.

Breslin and Deckers discussed what they had agreed on but not voted on, at the previous handbook meeting. They also agreed there wasn't a motion and nothing is set in stone, it could all be changed, therefore going forward that they think they will probably put in the handbook that any future hired employees will not get health benefits. Van Holsteyn asked if he could put his two cents in. He explained he feels this is the reason people come to the Town to work, they get 100% health benefits. He feels no one comes here for the pay. Deckers said it is a double edged sword, the board can only pay so much health insurance for current and retired employees, and they need to be financially responsible.

Van Holsteyn is concerned people won't come to work here and be dedicated to their job if they can't get health insurance because it is so expensive. Partridge expressed that she and her husband were dedicated to their farming careers and did not get health insurance from DFA nor did they get it after 20 years of full service just like many people in their careers. She is concerned with her taxes if everyone who currently works for the town full or part-time gets health insurance when they retire and we continue to offer health insurance to future employees. She feels you have to also take into consideration the tax payers. Van Holsteyn understood but he still feels you won't get good employees who stay here if you don't continue to offer full health benefits to everyone.

Breslin stated there are several employees who will retire in the next 10 years and we will be replacing these employees. She feels giving full health benefits to those retiring and the employees hired to replace them isn't going to work when they are trying to balance the budget. She feels that would be asking too much on the backs of the taxpayers who don't have health insurance or pay 25% with their full time job or have to have a part-time job to supplement their income. Breslin, van Holsteyn and Kohrs discussed the difference between working at McDonald's and working at the Town. Breslin feels highway employees will eventually need to be paid more per hour to get workers here and staying here. Van Holsteyn and Kohrs don't agree they feel the health benefits are enough to draw employees in and increasing the starting pay for starting highway employees above the current \$17/hr will only increase other costs like workers' comp.

Deckers announced if you are part-time or full-time; everyone has a job to do and everyone should have health coverage. Everyone has a gift they are giving to our Town and they are saving us money by being part-time and the Board needs to address that aspect.

Bookkeeper Tirpak asked Breslin why she states the retirement hours have to do with state retirement and where is it written. Deckers and Hulbert explained where to find it in the handbook. Deckers read it for her. Tirpak was upset with some board members interpreting the handbook as meaning the employee must have applied for and been granted a bona-fide retirement benefit. She didn't think that was fair.

Bookkeeper Tirpak handed the Board a list of full and part time employees who get health insurance from the town and a few who do not get theirs through their position at the town. Deckers and Hulbert looked over the list and picked out some part-time employees they thought were closest to retiring. They would like to see what they could do for these specific employees to help them out. Hulbert feels they should be Patti Fetty, Karen Tirpak, and Chris Kohrs. Deckers added Tom Sutton to the list also.

A community member, Matt Hausmann asked how many employees are on the bubble of retirement and has anyone done the math on how much it would actually cost the tax payers to see if the board can just go ahead and cover these people. Hulbert said he thought it would cost approximately \$400,000 for insurance on the four employees depending on how long they live. Breslin explained it is going to be hard because insurance costs keep going up and the costs change. Insurance cost is different from 55 yrs old – 65 yrs old since at 65 the cost is cut in half. She explained every year the board gets a spreadsheet and they go over it to see how much they can spend on health insurance without cutting the plan that is best for us.

Kohrs explained that even though she got a 3% increase in pay last year, her health insurance went up 4%. Breslin explained that is the same for everyone but some people don't get a 3% raise. Kohrs said she was trying to explain that she is not working at the town for what she takes home every week but she is here for the health insurance coverage for her family.

A motion was made by Deckers to maintain the integrity of the town by giving these part-timers their 100% health coverage as done in past practice.

Partridge asked if he meant current employees or in retirement. Breslin asked if he means he is grandfathering in anyone who is already here will get health coverage. Kohrs suggested let's say it is the health plan you have now since she has 100% coverage for herself and 50% for her family because she doesn't feel comfortable taking 100% for her family. Hulbert said he would be in agreement with that since they feel that is what they were told. Kohrs agreed since that is what some of them were told and it is only fair. Van Holsteyn said he was told after 20 years of working for the town he would have full health benefits when he retired.

Deckers made a motion to grandfather these people here who are part-time at this time and talk about the future.

Breslin interrupted and expressed her concern with making such a big decision without Marriott in attendance at the meeting. Hulbert agreed.

Partridge asked if Deckers was trying to make a motion on this specific subject for the new handbook even though no motions were made on all the things that were agreed on in the past 4 handbook meetings. Deckers stated they hadn't agreed on anything in the other meetings, but they had discussed a lot of things. He said he was also not happy with some of the wording in the minutes of the handbook meetings especially January 28th. Partridge was confused about

what he was talking about. Deckers started reading the minutes from that meeting on a designee for reporting Harassment. Breslin interrupted him and said they were working on health coverage right now and not the last minutes. Deckers stated he was talking about the reporting. Hulbert and Beslin wanted to stick with Health insurance right now.

Breslin continued that the Board had talked about future part time hires would not receive health insurance. No one on the Board remembers what was talked about at the last meeting. Deckers feels no more decisions can be made until there is a full board and Marriott has put the revisions in the new handbook draft copy.

Van Holsteyn asked about the time of retirement for future highway employees. Van Holsteyn presented his concerns with the discussion at the last meeting on future highway hires. He doesn't like the retirement age of 60 in the proposal. Breslin said they are trying to set standards to help balance the budget and at some point they need to start cutting costs to make balancing the budget reasonable. Van Holsteyn said he understands but he is trying to sell a job to potential employees and that is not a positive selling point. She said they will still be offered 100% medical and 100% dental while they are here and then 50% when they retire. They are trying to cut somewhere. She reminded him they added more vacation after 15 years and they have added comp time. He is worried about being able to find someone to hire. She said she understood that. He said he understands the dilemma the board is in but he wants them to understand the dilemma they are creating for him.

Breslin explained to all the highway employees present that the board is doing the best they can to keep them there and have the benefits they need while also trying to keep within a budget the taxpayers can handle and accept.

Deckers would like to adjourn until Marriott can be there with his notes and revisions.

Hulbert wants to make sure the meeting is in February so Deputy Clerk Fetty knows about her insurance before she retires on the 26th.

The next handbook meeting will be Tuesday February 25th at 6:30pm.

Council member Deckers motioned to adjourn at 8:12 p.m. seconded by Council member Hulbert.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Partridge,
Clerk/Collector